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EXAMINER

MONDT, JOHANNES P

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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3663

DATE MAILED: 10/13/2006

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

# Office Action Summary

Application No.

10/039,309

Applicant(s)

SATO ET AL.

Examiner

Johannes P. Mondt

Art Unit

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

## Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

## Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 01 August 2006.
- 2a) ☐ This action is FINAL. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

## Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1 and 4-9 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1 and 4-9 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) \_\_\_\_\_ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

## Application Papers

- 9) ☒ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☒ The drawing(s) filed on 07 November 2001 and 01 August 2006 is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☒ objected to by the Examiner.

Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).

Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).

- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

## Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some \* c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. \_\_\_\_\_.
3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

\* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

## Attachment(s).

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☒ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)  
Paper No(s)/Mail Date 11/7/01.
- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)  
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application
- 6) ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_.

## **DETAILED ACTION**

### ***Response to Amendment***

Amendment filed 8/1/06 forms the basis for this office action. In said Amendment applicant substantially amended all pending claims 1 and 4-9 at least through substantial amendment of claim 1. Applicant also submitted new Drawings and an amendment to the Specification. Comments on Remarks are included below under "Response to Arguments".

### ***Information Disclosure Statement***

A corrected version of Form PTO-1449 for the Information Disclosure Statement filed 11/07/01 is herewith enclosed with annotated corrections on "Date" (which means: Publication Date: see 37 C.F.R. 1.98 (b) (4)) and, for item BB, "Document No."

### ***Drawings***

1. The New Drawings filed 8/1/06 are accepted on substance but are objected to because they should be provided with a label "New Sheet" (see 37 C.F.R. 1.121(d)).
2. The Drawing of Figure 12(B) is objected to because two reference numerals, i.e., 12d and 30, point to exactly the same part.

### ***Specification***

1. The specification is objected to because the reference to Physical Review Vol. 5, No. 9, p. 577 (1970) does not appear to correspond to any existing article in The Physical Review.

The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

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The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.

2. The Specification is objected to because the adjective "intermediate" fails to provide a definite limitation on "gray": "gray" is intermediate between white and black; however, "intermediate gray" now claimed (lines 18-19 of claim 1) is not defined but merely introduced as "intermediate gray level" in the specification (see page 5, third paragraph), and forms a pleonasm. In particular, it is not defined between which gray levels the claimed "intermediate gray level" is bounded.

### ***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112***

The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.

3. ***Claims 1 and 4-9*** are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. In particular, the limitations "intermediate gray level display" and "multiple gray level display" are indefinite for the following reasons:

With reference to the objection to the Specification overleaf, "intermediate gray level display" as introduced in the newly amended language of claim 1 and, through dependence on claim 1, claims 4-9, is not defined, but merely introduced in the specification, without explanation of the pleonasm "intermediate gray": gray is already

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intermediate between black and white; between which levels "intermediate gray" is bounded is not defined through either claim language or specification, and hence the adjective "intermediate" renders the claims indefinite.

### ***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102***

The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

1. ***Claims 1, 4-6, and 8*** are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by van den Berk (4,536,059) (previously cited).

*Van den Berk* teaches a liquid crystal display device, comprising: a liquid crystal layer between two glass supporting plates 1 and 2; see col. 4, l. 25-37)); a pair of substrates 1 and 2 (loc.cit.) so as to interpose the liquid crystal layer therebetween (see Figure 3); and a plurality of pixels arranged in matrix pattern (col. 4, l. 10-12) wherein: the liquid crystal layer has a helical structure (col. 3, l. 65) and exhibits at least two stable states including a planar state (col. 3, l. 53-58) and a focal conic state (col. 3, l. 61-65) according to an applied voltage (loc.cit.); and in each of the plurality of pixels, a thickness d of the liquid crystal layer has at least two different values (see Figure 3), and the liquid crystal layer includes at least two regions having different values for a first threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer from the planar state to the focal conic state (because the electrodes 5 are provided in the grooves and extend over

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"second ridges" 4 onto "first ridges" 3, hence extend over regions of different thickness  $d$  (see Figure 3 and col. 3, l. 1-19) while said electrodes form an equipotential surface bordering the liquid crystal layer, and consequently the electric field at two positions of different thickness is different),

Wherein the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer satisfies a relationship of  $1 < d/P < 15$  with a helical pitch  $P$  of the helical structure as evidenced by Figure 1b, showing  $d=2P$  in at least one embodiment, and wherein the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer is defined so that  $V_{thFmax}$  is less than  $V_{thHmin}$  in each of the plurality of pixels, where  $V_{thFmax}$  denotes the first threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer included in a region with a largest thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer from the planar state to the focal conic state, and  $V_{thHmin}$  denotes a threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer included in a region with a smallest thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer from the focal conic state to a homeotropic state, because "Upon applying a voltage across the transparent electrodes" as described in col. 3, l. 61-65, "planar-conic texture changes into a focal-conic texture", while ONLY when the field strength increases above a given value  $E_2$  the helices uncoil and a transparent homeotropic-nematic texture is formed" (col. 3, l. 65-68), where  $E_1 < E_2$  (see col. 4, l. 1-5).

With regard to the limitation "whereby the liquid crystal display device is capable of performing an intermediate gray level display or a multiple gray level display", intended use and other types of functional language must result in a structural difference between the claimed invention and the prior art in order to patentably distinguish the claimed invention from the prior art. If the prior art structure is capable of

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performing the intended use, then it meets the claim. In re Casey, 152 USPQ 235 (CCPA 1967); In re Otto, 136 USPQ 458, 459 (CCPA 1963). In the underlying case there is no reason why a voltage across the liquid crystal layer could not be selected such that the electric field is below the planar-to-focal-conic transition threshold in one sector of the liquid crystal layer and above said transition threshold, because for a given voltage the electric field in the liquid crystal layer is inversely proportional to the thickness of said liquid crystal layer: the very existence of a finite difference in threshold voltage as a function of thickness is thus seen to make the liquid crystal device as claimed capable of performing the intended use.

*On claim 4:* a value of the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer increases from the center of the liquid crystal display (boss 10) to each end of the liquid crystal display device (Figure 3) and said increase in thickness is effected by a succession of a plurality of substantially flat or horizontal regions in a pixel electrode that provides a staircase pattern that rises (although not monotonically) from each of said ends to said center of the liquid crystal display device.

*On claim 5:* a difference  $\Delta d$  between the at least two different values of thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer satisfies a relationship of  $0.5 P \leq \Delta d$  with the helical pitch  $P$  of the helical structure, namely: while Fig. 1b shows that  $d/P = 2$  van den Berk teaches that the thickness at the area of the edges is only half the maximum thickness (col. 5, l. 19-21), i.e.,  $\Delta d = d/2$ , resulting in the teaching  $\Delta d \geq P > 0.5 P$ , i.e.,  $0.5 P \leq \Delta d$ .

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*On claim 6:* a value of the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer changes continuously across each of the plurality of pixels because a continuous line can be drawn across said pixels (see Figure 3) (see Figure 3).

*On claim 8:* at least one of the pair of substrates 1 and 2, namely: 1, includes a concave or convex surface (depending on one's center of reference being either below or above layer 1) that is closer to the liquid crystal layer than the other side.

### ***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103***

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

2. ***Claim 7*** is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over van den Berk as applied to claim 1, in view of Scherer (5,880,801) (first cited previously in office action mailed 4/2/704).

*Van den Berk teaches* a pair of alignment layers provided respectively on the pair of substrates on one side thereof closer to the liquid crystal (col. 5, l. 57-61). Van den Berk does not necessarily disclose one of said pair to be a horizontal alignment layer and the other one to be a vertical alignment layer.

*However, it would have been obvious* to include said further limitation in view of Scherer et al, who teach top and bottom substrates 42 and 44, respectively (cf. col. 4, l. 20-60) to be aligned horizontally and vertically, respectively, so as to achieve hybrid-



aligned cells by which an electro-optic response is achieved at low voltage compared with a device with pure homogeneous alignment (cf. col. 3, l. 29-47).

*Motivation* to include the teaching by Scherer into the invention by van den Berkin this regard stems from the desirability to achieve response at low voltage (Scherer, loc.cit), which is a ubiquitous advantage in the electrical art. Combination of said teaching and said invention is straightforward through the process to make HAN crystal cells as disclosed by Scherer et al (cf. col. 3, l. 7-47). Success in implementing said combination can therefore be reasonably expected.

3. **Claims 1, 8 and 9** are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Yamada et al (5,831,704) in view of Nakamura et al (5,576,860) (previously cited).

*Yamada et al teach* a liquid crystal device (title, abstract, "Background of the Invention"), comprising: a liquid crystal layer 3 (col. 9, l. 53-57); a pair of substrates 1/2b (col.10, l. 46 and col. 11, l. 49-63) and 5 (col. 11, l. 9) provided so as to interpose the liquid crystal therebetween (see Figure 5); and a plurality of pixels arranged in a matrix pattern (Figures 1 and 6 and their descriptions), wherein:

the liquid crystal layer has a helical structure (in the sense given by the specification (the liquid crystal molecules in said liquid crystal layer are twistable helically((see col. 1, l. 62 - col. 2, l. 14) and exhibits at least two stable state including a planar state (Figure 3A and col. 9, l. 52-60) and a focal conic state (Figure 3C and col. 9, l. 60-64) according to an applied voltage (lco.cit.); and

in each of the plurality of pixels, a thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer has at least two different values (col. 9, l. 52-56), and the liquid crystal layer includes at least two regions having different values of a first threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer from the planar state to the focal conic state (inherently so because the transition is determined by electric field value, not voltage value, - see for instance F.M. Leslie, "Introduction to Nematodynamics", Chapter 8 in "Physical Properties of Liquid Crystals: Nematics", Ed.: D. Dunmur et al, Institution of Engineering and Technology 2001, especially pages 393-394 (C3.1); while the electric field due to a voltage across a layer of a any thickness is voltage per thickness; see, e.g., J.D. Jackson, "Classical Electrodynamics", page 8).

wherein the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer satisfies a relationship  $1 \leq d/P$  (see col. 9, l. 57-60, from which it follows that a vertical alignment of molecules is possible when there is no voltage, and hence the thickness  $d$  must at least be equal to the pitch) with a helical pitch  $P$  of the helical structure; and

wherein the thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer is defined so that  $V_{thFmax}$  is less than  $V_{thHmin}$  in each of the plurality of pixels, where  $V_{thFmax}$  denotes the first threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer included in a region with a largest thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer from the planar state to the focal conic state (i.e., from state of Figure 3A to state of Figure 3C; loc.cit.), and  $V_{thHmin}$  denotes a second threshold voltage for transitioning the liquid crystal layer included in a region with a smallest thickness  $d$  of the liquid crystal layer from the focal conic state to a homeotropic state (because "when a saturation voltage is applied the liquid crystal molecules 7 align in a direction substantially parallel to the plate c"; cf. col. 9, l. 60-64; from which it can be concluded that no homeotropic transition has

taken place, considering the transition as described, from the planar state through gradual tilt over angle B to the focal conic state; col. 9, l. 52-col. 10, l. 9; the transition for a given thickness and voltage, i.e., for a given electric field (once again, only field values matter in the physics of molecular orientation) from focal conic to homeotropic inherently occurs at a higher threshold field value than the establishment of the focal conic state in the first place: without focal conic state no transition from the focal conic state is possible logically)

whereby the liquid crystal display device is capable of performing an intermediate gray level display or multiple gray level display (col. 9, l. 46-67) (N.B.: "intermediate" is considered a pleonasm, considering the meaning of "gray" in the art as being of intermediate color between black and white, and hence is considered automatically met by "gray"; "multiple gray" is considered met as well because for each "gray-scale voltage a different gray is achieved because the tilt depends on the electric field which depends inter alia on the voltage, while locally the thickness is fixed).

*Yamada et al do not necessarily teach* the range limitation that not only is  $P \leq d$  (which Yamada et al do teach, see overleaf), but even that  $d/P$  is truly between 1 and 15.

*However, it would have been obvious to include said further limitation in view of Nakamura et al*, who, in a patent on a liquid crystal display based on a nematic liquid crystal with helical pitch (cf. col. 3, l. 3-23), hence closely related to the liquid crystal device by Yamada et al based on nematic phases, i.e., relating to the orientation of the long axis of liquid crystal molecules (col. 9, l. 52-64), that the ratio of the liquid crystal layer (numeral 7 in Figure 5) thickness  $d$  divided by the helical pitch  $P$ , for the purpose

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of achieving high contrast and hence bright display, preferentially is to be in the range  $1.5 < d/P < 4$  (cf. col. 3, l. 10-45).

A *prima facie* case of obviousness typically exists when the ranges of a claimed composition overlap the ranges disclosed in the prior art or when the ranges of a claimed composition do not overlap but are close enough such that one skilled in the art would have expected them to have the same properties. In re Peterson, 65 USPQ2d 1379 (CA FC 2003).

*Motivation* to combine the teaching by Nakamura et al in this regard with the invention at least derives from the statement by Nakamura et al on the accomplishment of achieving a high contrast and thus a bright display (cf. col. 5, l. 1-3), which is a generic advantage for liquid crystal displays.

*On claim 8:* at least one of the pair of substrate includes a concave or convex surface on one side thereof that is closer to the liquid crystal layer than the other side, namely: either substrate 1/2b or substrate 5 (see Figure 5).

*On claim 9:* the pair of substrate 1/2b and 5 both include a concave or convex surface on one side thereof that is closer to the liquid crystal layer than the other side thereof.

4. **Claim 4** is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Yamada et al and Nakamura et al as applied to claim 1 above, and further in view of Ogawa et al (4,632,514) (previously cited).

*As detailed above, claim 1 is unpatentable over Yamada et al in view of Nakamura et al.*

*Although neither Yamada et al nor Nakamura et al necessarily teach the further limitation as defined by claim 4, it would have been obvious to include said further limitation in view of Ogawa et al, who, in a patent drawn to a multi-color liquid crystal display, hence analogous art to Yamada et al, teach variation of the thickness of the liquid crystal layer such that different abutting substantially flat or horizontal regions in a pixel electrode have different liquid crystal layer thickness for different color picture elements (cf. abstract and col. 3, l. 60-65) thus providing a staircase pattern (cf. abstract and Figures 15-16). Note that thickness increase is effected by a succession of a plurality of substantially flat or substantially horizontal regions (cf. Figures 15 1-6) and that in Figures 15-16 and 21-22 said thickness increases from the center to each end of the liquid crystal display.*

*Motivation to include the teaching by Ogawa et al in this regard is the minimization of optical rotatory dispersion thus improving quality of display (cf. abstract).*

### ***Response to Arguments***

Applicant's arguments filed 8/1/06 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive. In particular, although amendment to the Specification has been approved herewith, and although the amendment to the Drawings through added Figures has been approved on substance (see however a Drawing objection overleaf on the absence of the label "New Sheet"), the amendment to the claims fail to place any of the claims in condition for allowance. The newly added limitation (lines 18-19 of claim 1) is (a) indefinite (see above under 112, second paragraph), and (b) functional language without any distinguishing feature in as far as the device as claimed is concerned.

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In reference to the claim language “is capable of performing an intermediate gray level display or multiple gray level display” claims capability and by inference intended use without indicating any specific distinguishing structural feature, and as such constitutes functional language. Intended use and other types of functional language must result in a structural difference between the claimed invention and the prior art in order to patentably distinguish the claimed invention from the prior art. If the prior art structure is capable of performing the intended use, then it meets the claim. In re Casey, 152 USPQ 235 (CCPA 1967); In re Otto, 136 USPQ 458, 459 (CCPA 1963). In the underlying case the prior art structure is capable of performing the function because, inherently, at different thicknesses different electric field strengths  $E$  are achieved at a given voltage  $\phi$ , as witnessed from the relation  $\phi = \int \underline{E} \cdot d\underline{l}$  (see, for instance J.D. Jackson, “Classical Electrodynamics”, page 8). Counter to applicants’ Remarks (page 9), col. 1, l. 33-50) in Van den Berk does not teach that “the liquid crystal layer is either in the transparent state (as a whole) or in the light-scattering state (as a whole) depending (solely) on whether the field strength started from a value higher than  $E_2$  or a value lower than  $E_1$ ”. The qualifications between brackets are needed to give the traverse any weight, yet are not implied by Van den Berk. All field strengths recited in col. 1, l. 33-50, col. 2, l. 57-61 and col. 5, l. 21-29 are *local* field strengths and hence *depend on voltage and thickness*, while thickness variations inherently result in different regions having different field strengths, and, with regard to threshold values  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ , different history of reaching threshold values or having reached threshold values  $E_1$  and/or  $E_2$ . Therefore, the limitation newly added to claim 1, in addition to causing

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indefiniteness as pointed out above, fails to distinguish the claimed invention over the prior art as cited. Applicants' comments in traverse that Van den Berk does not "even discuss or recognize the problems in providing gray scale levels" (page 10 of Remarks) is irrelevant to the claims, drawn as they are to a device, at least to the extent that rejections were made under 35 U.S.C. 102, because no structural distinction has been made between the claimed invention and the prior art.

Finally, with regard to the comments on the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) of claim 7, allegation of deficiencies of Van den Berk as made by applicants are not persuasive with reference to the discussion overleaf, while Scherer had only been, and is once again, cited for limitations on alignment layers, and hence comments in traverse based on a failure by Scherer to teach at least two regions with different values of a first threshold voltage as claimed are not understood.

In addition, an update search resulted in what examiner believes is important additional prior art in the form of Yamada et al (5,831,704), over which claims 1, 8 and 9 are additionally rejected.

### ***Conclusion***

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Johannes P. Mondt whose telephone number is 571-272-1919. The examiner can normally be reached on 8:00 - 18:00.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Jack W. Keith can be reached on 571-272-6878. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

JPM  
October 11, 2006

Patent Examiner:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Mondt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Johannes Mondt (Art Unit: 3663)